

The President's Radio Address *June 12, 1999*

Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about what I believe we must do to ensure that more American families have the high quality health care they need to thrive. Our medical care is the best in the world, and we must make sure our health care system is, too. We all know this system is rapidly changing. Already, more than half of all Americans are in managed care plans. On balance, I think managed care has been good for America, decreasing costs and increasing Americans' access to preventive care.

But clearly, we must do more to make sure that when health care plans cut costs, they don't cut quality and that the bottom line never becomes more important than patients' needs. That's why more than a year and a half ago, I asked Congress to pass a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights that ensures critical protections for Americans in managed care, from the right to see a specialist to the right to emergency room care whenever and wherever you need it, to the right to hold health plans accountable for harmful decisions.

Using my authority as President, I've already acted to make these rights real for 85 million Americans who get their health care through Federal plans, from Medicare and Medicaid to the Veterans Administration health plan that serves millions of veterans and their families.

But until Congress acts, tens of millions of Americans in managed care are still waiting for the full protection of a Patients' Bill of Rights. Democrats in Congress have long been pressing to pass a strong, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights, and nearly every doctors' association, every nurses' association, every patients' rights group in America agrees that we need it now.

The Republican leadership in Congress has acknowledged that poor quality in managed care is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. I'm pleased that Senate Majority Leader Lott said he would bring managed care reform legislation to a vote on the Senate floor early this

summer. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership's legislation falls far short of providing American families the protections they need in a changing health care system.

Because it only applies to some health plans, it leaves tens of millions of Americans without these guarantees. It doesn't ensure patients access to specialists, like oncologists and cardiologists. It doesn't prevent health plans from forcing patients to change doctors in mid-treatment. It doesn't provide adequate recourse when a health plan provides less than adequate care. And it does not make clear, once and for all, accountants should not be able to arbitrarily overturn medical decisions.

A Patients' Bill of Rights that doesn't provide these important protections is a Patients' Bill of Rights in name only, and our people deserve better. Protecting our families should be an issue that brings us together. I've been encouraged that many Republicans have said they would work with Democrats to pass strong, enforceable managed care reform.

Today I ask the congressional leadership to move the right kind of managed care reform to the very top of their agenda. After all, we all get sick; we all need health care. No one asks us what our party affiliation is when we show up at the emergency room or the doctor's office. This isn't a partisan issue anywhere else in America; it shouldn't be in Washington, DC. Let's hold an open, fair debate and pass a real Patients' Bill of Rights that will strengthen our health care system, strengthen our families, and strengthen our Nation for the 21st century.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:57 p.m. on June 10 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 12. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 11 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.